

VZCZCXRO1318
OO RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHDIR RUEHKUK
DE RUEHTU #0046 0211114
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 211114Z JAN 09
FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5914
INFO RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 000046

SIPDIS

FOR NEA/FO, NEA/IR AND NEA/MAG

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/20/2019

TAGS: [PREL](#) [IR](#) [TS](#)

SUBJECT: IRANIAN VP RAMIMI'S VISIT TO TUNISIA "NOTHING
IMPORTANT"

REF: TUNIS 41 (NOTAL)

Classified By: Ambassador Robert F. Godec for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) During a January 12-13 visit to Tunisia, Iranian Vice President and "Special Envoy of Iranian President Ahmadinejad" Mohamed Reza Rahimi met with President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and Foreign Minister Abdelwaheb Abdallah to discuss the situation in Gaza, as well as bilateral relations. Abdallah told Ambassador that "nothing very important" had been covered in the meetings, whose focus was on preparing for the Tunisian-Iranian joint commission to be held in Tehran later this year. Abdallah confirmed that the Iranians had invited Ben Ali to pay an official visit to Tehran, and that his own outstanding invitation had been re-extended. He made clear that neither intends to take the Iranians up on this offer, explaining that they had responded by saying simply, "Insha'allah." Abdallah also joked that his travel schedule is "very full," with pending visits to Europe, Asia, Brazil and, he hopes, the United States. All of them, he suggested, would come before any visit to Iran.

¶2. (SBU) Rahimi also held a press conference in his hotel suite. According to press reports, he covered the following points:

-- On Gaza: Rahimi emphasized Iran's "unconditional support for the Palestinian cause and in particular for the people of Gaza, who have been subjected to 18 days of Israeli military aggression." He also said that in his meeting with Ben Ali, the two had "similar points of view with respect to crimes committed by the Zionists against the civilian population of Gaza."

-- On the impact of the Obama Administration: Rahimi said that from the Iranian perspective, there is no difference between Presidents Bush and Obama -- they all work against the good of humanity. The United States knows only how to use force to solve problems in the world.

-- On the possibility of an Israeli attack against Iran: Responding to a questions about recent noises indicating that Israel had planned to attack Iran but that it had not been encouraged by the United States, Rahimi said, "The Zionist State wouldn't dare attack us. The situation today no longer permits attacks against our country."

-- Tunisian-Iranian Presidential Visits: "We hope to have an exchange of visits between our two heads of state. We transmitted an official invitation to President Ben Ali."

¶3. (C) Comment: FM Abdallah went out of his way to downplay the significance of this visit. He was dismissive Rahimi's stature, pointing out that "Iran has something like six or seven vice presidents." Regarding the Tunisian-Iranian joint commission, he made a show of not recalling when or where the last session had been held. (His aide pointed out that it had been in Tunis in 2008.) End Comment.

Please visit Embassy Tunis' Classified Website at:
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/tunis/index.cfm>
Godec